



UNIVERSITY of
LOUISIANA
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Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Public Policy Center

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Analysis of Industrial Job Uptake in Louisiana

Executive Summary

Robert Habans, PhD
Stephen Barnes, PhD
Julian Hartwell, MS

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Executive summary

Purpose

Recent years have seen a surge of industrial project announcements in Louisiana, routinely involving billions of dollars in capital investment and projecting thousands of jobs. This growth in the industrial sector raises questions about job benefits for neighboring communities. Does job creation align with project announcements? What types of jobs are most associated with industrial projects, and is the local workforce filling these positions?

This analysis investigates the recent history of industrial job creation in Louisiana. It examines whether and to what extent local industrial employment increased during investment in the 2010s, focusing on the state's major industrial corridors. We also explore the geographic distribution of workers filling these new industrial jobs and demographic patterns.

Background

While Louisiana's industrial employment has followed national declines in some manufacturing sectors, construction jobs surged in the late 2010s, as chemical manufacturing grew and petroleum refining remained steady. Construction booms were significant in specific parishes that had industrial growth at this time, including Cameron, Calcasieu, and Ascension Parishes, often followed by modest, more sustained growth in manufacturing jobs. The analysis documents this pattern—a “wave” of construction jobs followed by a “tide” of manufacturing jobs—at the level of parishes and industrial census tracts in Louisiana during the 2010s and investigates the jobs implicated in these local trends.

Methods

This analysis examines trends in two Louisiana regions with longstanding concentrations of industrial activity and major investment announcements since 2010: (1) Southwest Louisiana, including Cameron and Calcasieu Parishes, and (2) the Mississippi River Corridor, including Ascension, St. John the Baptist, St. James, and St. Charles Parishes.

Measuring the employment impacts of industrial investments is challenging due to limited data. Public sources generally do not allow jobs to be attributed directly to individual projects or their indirect effects on suppliers or households. Instead, this analysis focuses on broader employment trends in two phases:

- Construction Jobs (NAICS Sector 23): Generally, these jobs are project-based and peak during period of major investment.
- Manufacturing Jobs (NAICS Sector 31-33): Generally, these jobs are sustained for longer periods of the operational life of an industrial facility.

We use multiple publicly available data sources, each of which capture these jobs at various levels of industrial and geographic detail. The most novel portion of the analysis uses data on commuting relationships, focusing on places in each parish where industry employment is concentrated, patterns linking jobs located in these places to the workers' residential location, and periods when a significant number of jobs were added.

See the **technical note** for specific data sources, as well as a general discussion of data limitations and other conceptual issues with assessing employment impacts.

Key Findings

- 1. Industrial growth since 2010 has translated into Louisiana jobs.** Between 2010 and 2020, Louisiana's industrial growth translated into a major surge in construction jobs, sustained growth in chemical manufacturing, and a peak and decline in petroleum refining. Together, these shifts mean Louisiana outpaced the nation in chemical manufacturing growth and saw elevated construction employment through the late 2010s. When measured as a percentage of total jobs and compared with the rest of the nation, Louisiana ranks high in non-residential construction and the highest among all states in chemical manufacturing and petroleum refining.
- 2. Louisiana's industrial jobs are geographically concentrated, and the 2010s industrial construction boom was even more concentrated.** Industrial manufacturing and construction jobs are geographically clustered in major industry corridors in Southwest Louisiana and the River Parishes, as well as smaller industrial corridors of urban areas and small towns. A large proportion of the new construction jobs during the 2010s boom were in Cameron, Calcasieu, and Ascension Parishes, where they were followed by a more modest but sustained increase in manufacturing employment.
- 3. During local construction booms, a large portion of net new jobs were linked to residents outside the region where the job was located.** While industrial investments have created significant short-term construction employment in several Louisiana parishes, many of the net new jobs were filled by workers who live outside of the commuting region where the job was located, mainly workers from within Louisiana or Texas. This pattern is clearest in Cameron Parish during the period of peak LNG construction, but it also occurred during the 2010s construction booms in Calcasieu and Ascension Parishes. This pattern in the data may reflect the practice in industrial construction of deploying workers from across a multi-state region to job sites as needed. In any given year, there are many workers from Louisiana who work in Texas and vice versa, with the number of Louisiana workers deployed to Texas often larger than the flow of workers from Texas to Louisiana. The total volume of these flows between Louisiana and Texas also peaked in the late 2010s.
- 4. While many industrial jobs are also filled by local workers in nearby parishes or counties, these workers do not always reside in the same parish where the job is located.** Given the specialized education, training, and skills required for some industrial jobs, companies may draw their workforce from a larger geographic area, and workers may be more willing to commute long distances for high-paying jobs. For example, 38 percent of the net new industrial jobs created in the most industrial parts of Ascension Parish between 2010 and 2018, were linked to residents of Ascension Parish, with others commuting from Livingston, East Baton Rouge, Tangipahoa, and other parishes farther away. In the River Parishes, more net new jobs between 2013 and 2018 were linked to residents of St. Charles and Ascension than St. John the Baptist and St. James. Industrial jobs often involve longer commutes than jobs in the services sector.
- 5. Industrial expansions are often characterized by a construction boom followed by a smaller bump in manufacturing employment.** This pattern creates sharp increases in local job demand that are temporary and often filled by out-of-region workers, while long-term operations-phase employment is more limited and filled by a regional workforce.

6. **Employment in industrial jobs is uneven across demographic groups.** Industrial jobs in Louisiana offer strong wages and often do not require a four-year degree, but employment in these opportunities is uneven across demographic groups. The analysis highlights:
- **Workforce Composition.** The industrial workforce is predominantly male and disproportionately White, especially in higher-paying chemical manufacturing and petroleum refining roles. Hispanic workers are overrepresented in construction, while Black workers are underrepresented in both construction and manufacturing.
 - **Education and Job Requirements.** Many construction and manufacturing jobs are accessible with a high school diploma or technical training. Higher credentials are more common in refining and chemicals, where specialized, technical, and management roles often require an associate or bachelor's degree, though most frontline jobs remain accessible without one. While the data reflects these educational attainment patterns, other important barriers may impact access to jobs, such as mandatory screening and credentialing requirements.
 - **Earnings Disparities.** Despite strong wages overall (about \$100,000 median in refining and chemicals), median earnings of Black workers are about two-thirds the median earnings of White workers, and differences remain even when comparing workers of the same industry and education level, reflecting both a credential gap and occupational sorting into lower-paying roles.

For more information

A separate **slide deck** includes additional details and findings, including numerous maps, graphics, and tables. The local and commuting pattern analysis focuses on the following parishes: Cameron, Calcasieu, Ascension, St. James, St. John the Baptist, and St. Charles; and additional detail on these parishes is included in the **parish vignettes appendix** of the slide deck.

Additional Research

Further research should explore how industrial jobs are filled. It should also diagnose the barriers that limit local workforce participation, including employer practices, labor market dynamics, and access challenges, and identify concrete solutions that can inform state and local policy. These insights will be critical not only for understanding current industrial job trends but also for ensuring long-term workforce success in emerging clean energy industries.